

INVESTIGATING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: A FEMINIST'S PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

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The issue of sexual exploitation of children occurs in various forms and across socio-economic, racial, and cultural classes. Children experience abuse at the hands of authority figures who are family members, friends, and sometimes strangers. The discussions on this social issue tell the stories of children who have experienced abuse along with the processes and outcomes that arise in providing assistance to help them cope with these unwanted experiences. Discourses in the fields of psychology, social work, medical sciences, and law have in their own unique style, taken different measures to highlight and address this social problem. However, there is remarkably little discussion held on the institutional changes that are required to stop this practice of child sexual abuse and public discourse and response is not reflective of the urgency required to address the issue. I argue that to address the issue of child sexual abuse requires addressing all the elements entrenched in the institutions of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality that fosters and promotes the subjugation of women and children, which is a topic best addressed through feminist theory.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The issue of sexual exploitation of children occurs in various forms and across socio-economic, racial, and cultural classes. Children experience sexual abuse verbally, physically, emotionally, psychologically and through printed and digital media. They experience abuse at the hands of family members, family friends, persons in authority, and strangers. The discussions that occur on this social issue tell the stories of reported, investigated, and substantiated claims along with the processes and pitfalls that arise in providing assistance to those who have suffered directly from the effect of these unwelcomed experiences (Warner 2009, 17, 250). The injustices suffered by these children arise as a part of the discourse in the human service professions, medical sciences and the law. Each profession has taken a different approach to highlight and address this social problem. However, remarkably little discussion is held on the institutional changes required to stop this practice, and public discourse and response is not reflective of the urgency required to address this issue.

I argue that to address the issue of child sexual abuse requires addressing all the elements entrenched in the structures of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality that fosters and promotes the subjugation of women and children (Warner and Reavey 2003, 17; hooks 2000, 62; Warner 2009, 51), is an issue best addressed through feminist discourse. Child sexual abuse is a social issue that is present in many Westernized societies, whether they are developed or are developing nations (UNICEF State of the World's Children 2007 Report; Kinnear 2007). For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on this issue in North American society, primarily the United States.

The frequencies with which child sexual abuse, which I will classify as incidents of sexual violence, are exercised upon children are no greater or lesser in one society or another. The World Health Organization reports that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of physical and sexual violence in 2002 (WHO, Geneva 2005, p. xiii). We should find such numbers alarming and express concern that these acts occur and that the occurrence affects not only the individuals involved, but also their families, communities, and the wider society. We all may or may not share this point of view. However, I would like for you to think of a moment, and you may be able to recall an occasion when you or someone you knew, particularly a male, were viewed suspiciously while interacting with children when there were no obvious indications that you were a parent, caregiver, or a teacher. Alternatively, I suggest you read the story of Turtle Gal, which I have included in the appendices and evaluate your responses to the events as they unfold.

As a feminist and an advocate, I believe in the rights of individuals, to have every opportunity to achieve their fullest potential; the right to have choices and the right to basic civil liberties. I am therefore deeply concerned about the fate of our children, who are at risk of experiencing sexual abuse.

Definitions

Firstly, I would like to begin by defining a child and secondly, I will provide several definitions of child abuse. For the purposes of this thesis, I will define children according to the United Nations Charter of the Rights of the Child Article 1, which states, “A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” (UN Charter of Rights on the Child

1989). My premise for using this criterion is because of the UN status as a representative of 193 nations. However, it is to be noted that this definition of a child is a recent construction. In *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives*, Heather Montgomery points out that Philippe Ariès argues in the *Centuries of Childhood* that, in Western Europe, the “notion of childhood as a distinct human condition emerged only at the end of the fifteenth- century ” and that, “in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist” (Montgomery 2009, 51). Ariès work on childhood has led to the conclusion, by those who have studied his work and conducted their own research, “that childhood is socially constructed and that it changes depending on the historical and cultural setting” (Montgomery 2009, 51).

The definition of a child as well as rights of the children as offered through the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child is one that we now utilize, however, not one shared by all nation states. The United States in particular have yet to ratify the charter. In an article, “Convention on the Rights of the Child and Juvenile Justice” written for the *Child Welfare League of America Journal*, Jenni Gainborough and Elisabeth Lean pointed out that the United States along with Somalia were the only two countries who had not ratified the charter of rights. (Gainborough and Lean 2008, 1) They concluded that this was “paradoxical” given that the United States was instrumental in its development and final draft. (Gainborough and Lean 2008, 1) Although the United States has not ratified the charter of rights, their involvement in its development and subsequent final draft and signature in 1995 by Madeline Albright on behalf of President Clinton and other subsequent ratification of optional protocols to the charter of rights is enough to conclude that they share in the UN's definition of a child.

In her book, *Childhood Sexual Abuse*, Karen Kinnear (2007) offers several definitions of child abuse as gathered from several sources. One definition by Fraser (1981) states, that sexual abuse, is “the exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult.” Another definition provided in a 2003 report for The Children’s Bureau of the US Department of Health and Human Services is the “involvement of the child in sexual activity to provide sexual gratification or financial benefit to the perpetrator, including contacts for sexual purposes, molestation, statutory rape, prostitution, pornography, exposure, incest, or other sexually exploitative activities” (Kinnear 2007, 2).

In her introduction in *Child Sexual Abuse: Feminists Perspectives* Emily Driver defines child sexual abuse as “any sexual behavior directed at a person under 16 without that person’s consent” (Driver 1989, 3). Driver emphasizes her use of consent to ensure that a clear stand is taken on the exploitation of the child as opposed to requiring a degree of harm to determine the attitude to take towards each offender (Driver 1989, 4). In other words, Driver is saying that it is necessary to establish whether a child has consented to the sexual activity and to use that as the determinant for abuse as opposed to measuring the degree to which the child is harmed to determine how to treat the offender. An example would be saying that because the perpetrator only touched the child as against having intercourse with the child determines the level of harm done to the child.

Driver is suggesting here that the approach to consider in discussing child sexual abuse or in organizing responses to such acts requires that we take into consideration that the child may have consented to sex. While I may understand her point of view that children may consent to sexual activity with an adult by understanding that children have

agency, it is somewhat difficult to accept that children can give consent to a sexual relationship with an adult before the age of 18, when they become adults.

The Problem of Child Sexual Abuse

The United Nations Charter of Rights lays out the guidelines for which nations need to strive to meet the needs of their children and in so doing points out some of the atrocities they endure, such as physical and mental violence, abuse, neglect, and maltreatment. Article 19 of the charter states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. (UN Charter on the Rights of the Child 1989)

The charter here instructs States to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety of children from harm including sexual abuse. However, despite having the charter and the support of most nations many children are suffering from sexual abuse.

In a documentary feature, “Our America with Lisa Ling” broadcasted on the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) on November 20, 2011, Ling highlights the plight of thousands of American girls who are trafficked and forced into becoming sex slaves in the Washington D.C area, six blocks from the congressional building. Girls, as young as twelve years old, are sold and forced into having sex with multiple men each night. The solicitors of these services are men who are diplomats, pastors, and police officers, just to name a few of the “trusted” and “respected” members of our society (Ling 2011). Other media representations of this issue are in films such as “Lolita,” which depicts the incestuous relationship of a middle-aged man with his 12-year-old stepdaughter. The issue with this film is that it tells the story from the man’s point of view portraying him as

the victim rather than the perpetrator. In contrast, the portrayal of the girl, Lolita, is that of the seductive perpetrator sending the message that young girls can seduce older men and that men are helpless against them. The TV series Law and Order SVU depict the NY Police Department Sex Crime Unit that explores all sex related crimes against individuals. The series seek to send the message about sexual violence, so viewers can become aware of some of the current issues but sometimes the complexity of the episodes reinforce patriarchy and reiterate a state of victimhood on persons who have experienced sexual violence. Finally, talk shows such as, Oprah, Dr. Phil, Tyra Banks, and special programming, for example 20/20, discuss cases or share stories of person who have experienced sexual abuse and while these talk shows are not perfect they do a better job in articulating the issues, as survivors are able to tell their own story of their experiences. Further discussions with a peer on this topic of child sexual abuse brought to my awareness that there were more commercials on television highlighting the plight of abused animals than there was highlighting the plight of abused children.

Sexual abuse cases can be exceedingly difficult to prove if there are no indications of forced aggression resulting in physical harm. The onus of proof for victims of sexual assault or abuse rests upon them. It is their word against the perpetrator and as I mentioned earlier; those perpetrators can be “respected” and “trusted” men, regardless of their socioeconomic, racial, or cultural status, in comparison to an imaginative child (Kinnear 2007, 5).

Children within certain Western societies are often reminded that, they are children, and that they “should be seen and not heard” (credited to John Mirk, 1450 as cited on phrases.org). In its original meaning, the saying was directed towards young,

unmarried girls, however, over time it has been used as a general application towards all children (cited on phrases.org.uk). Given the continued use of this adage, it may be argued that it continues to be believed and maintained in western society, because of the belief that this is the way in which children are supposed to be treated. I argue that this adage, however, simplistically viewed, has played a significant role in the treatment of children within American society, and especially in the South where family values have significant importance and roles are emphasized. This belief also significantly affects a child's ability to tell what they have experienced.

Additionally, children are viewed as property within western culture. In *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, the authors John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1997) discusses this idea when the British settlers questioned Native Americans about the ways in which they raise their children. Native Americans did not consider their children to be property; therefore, they extended their love towards all children instead of just their own children unlike the British (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997, 8). It is this idea of children as property that reduces emotional and physical support for vulnerable children. It is this idea, along with such adage that serves to reduce the opportunities for children to have all the necessary love and support they need as well as a forum through which to express themselves and voice their hurts. In order to help our children, we need to provide them with trustworthy adults and a forum to voice their concerns only; then can we begin to listen and help. For those children who have been fortunate to have parents or guardians who listen to them, they have begun the process for some form of healing and recovery to take place, but for those who do not have this kind of support, they experience daily repeats of victimizations (Warner 2009, 216).

Children who complained about sexual abuse are often accused of lying. In research conducted by Katherine Ketcham and Elizabeth Loftus in 1994, they suggested that children who claimed to have been sexually abuse were recreating these memories through the therapeutic process and as such, their memories were false (Loftus and Ketchum 1994). Champagne expounds on the effect that this idea, of “false memories” as posited by Loftus and Ketcham, has had on incest survivors. She mentions the False Memory Syndrome Foundation which she termed as an “antifeminist political backlash targeted against incest survivors and their therapist” (Champagne 1996, 167). The foundation’s purpose was to assist family members accused of sexual abuse. This was in response to what they called “ a growing wave of accusations of incest or sexual abuse brought on by adults who recovered memories’ of events that families and people involved in the memories claim just could not have happened” (Champagne 1996, 170). The false memory findings were used by those accused to defend themselves from the accusations of child abuse. They used the research to discredit the person’s memory, and because the accusers had no physical evidence to prove that the abuse indeed happened, what resulted was that they were further victimized and accused of making false allegations (Champagne 1996, 172).

Not every child will be sexually abused, but every child is at risk for abuse. Judith Herman, a renowned psychiatrist, states, “Sexual abuse is common – best estimates: at least one girl in three, one boy in ten” (Champagne 1996, 167). It should not be the case that we live in societies in which this is an option. Children are to be valued and protected as members of our society who are to have the same rights and privileges as everyone else. Feminists advocate for the rights of children and the issue of child abuse not because

it is a feminist problem, but because it is a social and political issue and one that vastly affects the lives of women. Warner points this out by stating, “Child sexual abuse represents a key site in which unequal and gendered power relations are played out” (Warner 2009, 226). Here, Warner is pointing out that gender is a site of oppression and as a site of oppression, it is necessary to theorize the ways in which gender is related to the issue of child abuse, since more women than men are affected by child abuse.

Earlier I mentioned that in order to address the issue of child sexual abuse requires addressing the systems of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality because these are systems that privileges males over females. Adult rape and child sexual abuse were linked, as common tools of female oppression in the service of patriarchy. “...rape of some women and girls by some men served all men by keeping all women and girls fearful and subordinate.” (Warner 2009, 57) Rape is an abuse of power rather than being about sex; male sexuality in western society is about the deployment of power (Warner 2009, 57). These are the understandings that feminists have about the ways in which males have exercised their power over women. Firstly that, patriarchy provides them with this privilege and secondly that, by exercising their power in this way they are enforcing heterosexuality. A greater number of women and girls are sexually abused, than are boys, which leads to the conclusion that heterosexuality is of enormous importance, which suggests women and girls must have sex with men.

Chapter 2: Feminist Perspectives on Child Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is not a recent phenomenon. What is recent is the frequency with which public discourse and media reports are beginning to highlight incidences of abuse. Knowledge of the frequency of the occurrence of child sexual abuse and our current understanding of child sexual abuse are primarily the result of the actions of feminist. In her article, "The Politics of Child Sexual Abuse: Notes from American History," Linda Gordon points out that feminists have been involved since 1870 in speaking about the abuse of children. "Firstly in opposing corporal punishment, and then challenging the sanctity of the Victorian home and authority of the paterfamilias [father of the family]" or in other words challenging the father as the ultimate authority of the family (Gordon 1988, 57). The next emergence of sizeable feminist interference occurred in the 70s by way of the Women's Liberation Movement, which highlighted the plight of women and girls (Warner 2009, 54).

In *Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Reference Handbook*, Karen Kinnear (2007) argues there is a long history of adults and children engaging in sexual relations. "In early Christian history, women were considered the property of first the father and then the husband; female children were also considered property and had no rights. The early church considered 12 the age at which a young girl could be married. Both the Bible and the Talmud encouraged men to have sexual relations with young girls" (Kinnear 2007, 123). Kinnear (2007) continues to discuss the various practices endorsed by the Talmud, Hindu religion, and in Greek society, which encouraged sexual relations with children and ruled such actions as invalid. Ruling them as invalid meant that the occurrence was

of no consequence and was not an offense, as opposed to today where a child engaging in sexual activity with an adult is illegal.

Kinnear (2007) chronicles the incidences of child sexual abuse and responses beginning with the earliest report in 900 as represented in Lady Murasaki's tales of Genji, where she speaks of the relationship she had with Prince Genji of Japan by whom she was adopted at the age of 10 (Lady Murasaki 1955, 146). Other significant incidents were reported in 1179, when the Catholic Church began sentencing clerics to a monastic life because they had molested boys and young men (France 2004) and in the 1500s when England began enacting legislation to protect boys from forced sodomy and girls under 10 from forcible rape (Kinnear 2007, 124). These incidents highlight and show the duration of time that sexual assault on 'feminized' individuals has been occurring (Warner 2009, 191). Additionally, John Stoltenberg points out that the "sexuality of male supremacy is viscerally committed to domination and subordination," and the desire for "forced sex, bullying sex, violent sex, injurious sex, humiliating sex, hostile sex, murderous sex" (Stoltenberg 1993, 68); based on the perceptions that "men are masters, women are slaves, men are superior, women are subordinate, men are real, women are objects, men are sex machines, women are sluts" (Stoltenberg 1993, 69).

As I mentioned earlier, feminists have played a monumental role in highlighting and advocating for women and children in the area of sexual abuse and as Kinnear (2007) points out there is a long history of child/adult sexual relations. Of importance is the role of feminists and the reason their role is crucial in continuing to address the issue of child sexual abuse. hooks writes, "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks 2000, viii). Sexual abuse and sexual violence are demonstrations

of the use of power. Power privileges an individual or certain classes of individuals to act upon those without power and without privileges – women and children fall within this category (Driver 1989). Feminists come from varied backgrounds and have used their knowledge and experiences to articulate issues surrounding child sexual abuse; some use science and medicine, literature, academia and law as their instruments of advocacy. Feminism is unique in the contributions it seeks to make in addressing the issue of child sexual abuse while also recognizing that it is not that one master theory that can “solve” the problem of child abuse but that this issue requires a multiplicity of theoretical and practical solutions (Warner 2009).

hooks (2000) offers keen insight into the issue of sexism, she states, “Sexist thinking taught to females from birth on had made it clear that the domain of sexual desire and sexual pleasure was always and only male, that only a female of little or no virtue would lay claim to sexual need or sexual hunger” (hooks 2000, 85). This sexist thinking that hooks (2000) describes here, emphasizes and illustrates that men are primarily the ones who are to have sexual desire and sexual pleasure and as such they are the ones with the authority and privilege to satisfy those desires. I argue that this is the thinking that has led some men to believe that they have the right to exercise their power and privilege to receive sexual pleasure from others, in this case, women and children, whether or not these individuals are willing or are able. In her book, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, hooks (2000) calls for a level of consciousness about the issues of racism, sexism, violence, and spirituality and suggests that there are alternatives to that with which we are familiar. It is this idea of an alternative that I want to appeal to, for us to begin thinking about a society without child abuse.

In *A Hunger So Wide and So Deep: A multicultural View of Women's Eating Problems*, Becky Thompson (1994) discusses the ways in which women's eating problems are often misunderstood. She states, "Those suffering from eating problems invariably are thought to be young, middle to upper class, heterosexual white women desperately trying to mold their figures to standards created by advertisers and clothing designers" (Thompson 1994, 1). Thompson (1994) argues that this perception is incorrect, because they are "skewed assumptions about race, class, and sexuality (Thompson 1994, 1)." She goes on to point out that the issue of eating problems can be found among women, of all classes, races, and sexualities and does not represent a disorder, but a means to "self-preservation" in response to the "myriad of injustices" such as "racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ...emotional, physical, and sexual abuse" that they have suffered (Thompson 1994, 2). Thompson tells the story of "Ruthie, a thirty-four year old Puerto Rican woman" who developed eating problems such as bulimia, dieting, and compulsive eating when she was fourteen in response to her godmother's father who began molesting her at age twelve. Luckily for Ruthie her molester died when she was sixteen, and she "stopped purging" (Thompson 1994, 48-49).

This strategy of "self-preservation" that Thompson(1994) speaks of is further corroborated by Charlotte Haney(2010) who in an article, "Child Sexual Abuse and the Reproduction of Femininity in the United States" shares stories of women who were sexually abused as children and how the abuse is "literally written upon their bodies" (Haney 2010, 27). Haney (2010) points out that these abused women engage in "self-disciplining" their bodies in response to their abuse, because it is their belief that their bodies have betrayed them;a belief that she suggests is an example of symbolic violence,

which is, in addition to the physical violence, of the experience, because it “internalizes the humiliations and legitimations of inequality.” (Haney 2010, 28) Haney (2010) cites Philippe Bourgois (2002) in stating that symbolic violence “persuades the victims that their own actions are the cause of their own predicament and that their subordination is the logical outcome of the natural order of things” (Haney 2010, 28). This belief explains why women would use food to control how their bodies look whether eating too much to be fat and unattractive in their own eyes or eating very little to be thin and unattractive. Primarily their concern is to do whatever it takes not to invite any further sexual abuse.

The message from these instances is that one women’s issues are often misunderstood, misdiagnosed, and pathologized. This I argue is a result of our patriarchal structure. Males dominate the fields of science and medicine; therefore, they are the ones who have the opportunity and access to resources that will determine what opinions are formed in response to a person’s behavior or physiological indications and they are the ones who articulate the issues. Secondly, they are less likely to be victims of the types of injustices mentioned, thus unable to understand one’s need or desire to develop various strategies for survival. A further response to Thompson’s argument is that, provided there is sufficient interest to address an issue or in this instance to help women with eating problems, finding alternative approaches outside of the present patriarchal approaches are integral in finding solutions to help individuals to obtain the justice they seek. Thompson (1994) has pointed out a link to sexual abuse and eating problems and what she has concluded is that you would be unsuccessful trying to treat an eating problem without addressing the underlying issue of the abuse. Becky Thompson is a teacher of African American Studies and American Studies and her book speaks to the issue of women’s

health, and how these issues are often presented in negative, stereotypical images, that minimize the importance of women's issues in relation to those of males.

In her book, *Understanding the Effects of Child Sexual Abuse: Feminists Revolutions in Theory, Research, and Practice* Sam Warner (2009), discusses the ways in which psychotherapy works to help individuals cope with experiences of child sexual abuse. She states that she utilizes "post-structuralism and feminism" as theories of analysis. Warner points out that by using these approaches she is able to make "critical reflections" to "question the assumptions that feminism sometimes invites [her] to make" (Warner 2009, 6). My focus here is on Warner's approach to therapy, which she names "visible therapy" (Warner 2009, 167). According to Warner (2009) visible therapy "highlight the need to trace and be explicit about the vested interests and ideas that inform therapeutic work and which construct therapeutic realities" (Warner 2009, 168). Therapy is essential for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse because both category of individuals, interpret their experiences differently. Some are victims and remain as such while others begin as victims and then become survivors. Therapy in this context then is particularly valuable. The therapeutic relationship if entered into is particularly valuable because it is through such a process that persons assess their experiences. Warner (2009) stresses the importance of "tracking language use in order to understand and challenge its effect"; here she is emphasizing the importance of how to speak about the experience because that determines the effect it will or will not have on the person who is sexually abused (Warner 2009, 168). Warner (2009) points out that it is necessary to "make sense of experiences, in both past and present life, that underpin mental and social difficulties (Warner 2009, 168). She is emphasizing that child sexual

abuse is not a determinant for future mental and social difficulties. It is not a given that persons who have been sexually abused will automatically have mental and social problems. What is crucial is the ways in which they put their experience into language that will determine the effect of that experience upon their identity and their social functioning. This is particularly notable, because it helps to provide empowerment for those persons who find it difficult to move on with their lives, because of their experience. She also challenges therapists and other service providers to be responsible in the ways in which they work with these individuals to ensure that they do no further harm (Warner 2007, 20, 174-5).

In *Child Sexual Abuse: Feminist Perspectives*, Emily Driver (1989) seeks to provide some solutions to issues of child sexual abuse. She highlights the powers we have as individuals which can be used to begin to combat the problem. The first strategy is political power. Driver (1989), draws on the efforts of female activists who petitioned the British Parliament in the 1870s raising concerns about child prostitution that resulted in “the age of heterosexual female consent raised from 13 to 16 in 1865” as well as other campaigns that were led by women to address the issue of child sexual abuse (Driver 1989, 170). The second strategy of power we have is emotional power. This she suggests is our ability to empathize or to take what she calls the “child’s eye view;” which is to see the problem from the position of the child, by evaluating the options they have and reevaluating how we see their resistance to sexual abuse, which may be active or passive, but resistance nonetheless (Driver 1989, 173). An example would be a child verbally challenging an adult or complaining about having a stomachache. These are every day ordinary observances, but in some situations, they could be indicators of sexual abuse.

The third point of power Driver (1989) states is power over our emotions. Driver (1989) suggests that as adults, we find it difficult to discuss the issue of sexual abuse and we are fearful of the repercussions of our intervention. We are unsure of how to respond when we learn of the abuse. Driver (1989) states, “Naturally: a common survival strategy in reaction to a situation that causes fear is not acceptance or confrontation, but denial and flight” (Driver 1989, 175). This fear prevents us from acting because we are afraid of what comes next once we acknowledge or decide to confront the issue. There is fear of the legal process and institutions (Driver 1989, 176). By educating ourselves on the issue and beginning to take a child-centered approach in addressing this issue, we can begin to see some inroads in addressing this issue. Feminist framework Driver (1989) points out help to clarify ideas and to assist in the improvement of the different practices. In her instance, she is an activist, counselor to abused children, a play therapy consultant, and an attorney practicing family and criminal law.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Conclusion

I began this research with the aim of coming up with some solutions to address the issue of child sexual abuse, but what I have learnt is that the solutions that are required are far greater than I had imagined. Child sexual abuse is a global issue perpetuated in many societies around the world. Champagne states, “Totalizing theories – those that offer solutions – do not effect progressive social change. For this reason, the problem of sexual abuse and its aftereffects cannot be “solved” by one person, one idea, one moment, one word, one wish, one master theory, or one television production” (1996, 182).

I began by first examining my own understanding of sexual abuse as I have seen and heard about it throughout my various life experiences. One acknowledgement I had to make was that there was no one concise definition of child sexual abuse and that there are many ways in which to experience abuse. The idea and understanding that we have about sexual abuse and its experiences are social constructions that are always evolving and changing. Additionally I learned from reading stories, in *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women*, written by women survivors of child sexual abuse and in their accounts, they did not speak of their experience as abuse (Sistren Theatre Collective 2005). I now had to move away from my own understanding of child sexual abuse as – any form of sexual interaction with an adult. I had to learn to accept that the sexual experiences children have with adults, can only be termed as sexual abuse only if the children articulate the experiences as such. I must admit that this was a difficult acknowledgement to make, but as a feminist, I know that individuals have agency in their

own experiences, an acknowledgement endorsed by Champagne and others (Champagne 1996, 175-176).

Another realization I had was that unacceptable and unwelcomed sexual experiences of individuals influences their social relationships with others and the ways in which others perceive them. The effect of sexual abuse results in what therapists describe as “aftereffects.” Champagne (1996) discusses this aftereffect manifested in the form of multiple personality disorder. Therapists such as Sam Warner (2009) in *Understanding the Effects of Child Sexual Abuse: Feminist Revolutions in Theory, Research, and Practice*, discusses the mental health issues that individuals suffer because of sexual abuse. She points out “child sexual abuse is largely associated with negative psychological and social consequences” (Warner 2009, 16). Champagne (1996) makes a similar argument in *The Politics of Survivorship: Incest, Women’s Literature, and Feminist Theory*. She gives the account of Flora Rheta Schreiber’s *Sybil* – a young girl sexually, physically, and verbally abused by her mother throughout her childhood (Champagne 1996, 125). During her abusive period, *Sybil* developed multiple personality disorder, which Champagne suggests *Sybil* used as a coping strategy (1996, 128).

Another example is the story of *Turtle Gal*, by Beth Brant (1990). This story is about a little girl whose neighbor takes her in when her mother died, an elderly man who lives alone. The way in which the story unfolded had me reading with an expectation of the horror of sexual abuse that was about to befall the little girl. During a class discussion of this story many of my fellow classmates shared that they had a similar experience while reading the story. Our professor, Wairimú Njambi then asked us why we thought we read the story with such expectations (WST 3015, spring 2011). In seeking to respond to this

question, I recognized that our society has taught us to have these expectations because of the frequency with which sexual abuse occurs and primarily because of how it is discussed in our society and within the media. Fear immobilizes us with an expectation that our children can become victims at any time and that we are powerless to do anything. Sexual abuse is a personal and social issue that affects the individual, the community, and the society, because it affects the ways, in which the individual perceives relationships with adults and how we as individuals perceive and interpret the relationship children have with adults.

Another acknowledgment is, "...sexual assault is largely perpetrated by men against the feminized ..." (Warner 2009, 191) and as further emphasized by John Stoltenberg "sexuality is stuck in male supremacy" and that this sexuality is committed to domination and subordination" (Stoltenberg 1993, 68). This realization also shows that in order to address the issue of child sexual abuse requires addressing sexual violence in general, however, we must recognize that solutions require structural changes within patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality that gives men as a class privileges over women and children. Child sexual abuse is a personal experience, but also a political issue that requires everyone advocating for the rights of women and children to be free from abuse and victimization (Warner 2009, 167). There is the necessity to address the personal issue by assisting survivors in theorizing and articulating their experiences (Champagne 1996, 176) and the political that addresses the ways in which these individuals gain assistance from various service providers, therapists, social workers, and the law. The foremost importance is the removal of the stigma that surrounds individuals who have experienced abuse. Emily Driver, points out that, "In many cultures, the incest

taboo hold far greater stigma for the person who reports the act than for the one who commits it” (Driver 1989, 176).

Child sexual abuse is a social and political problem that requires intervention on all aspects. First, we need to recognize that child sexual abuse is institutionalized within the systems of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality and that we need to continue to search for alternative ways to challenge these systems so that we can end the sexual exploitation of women and girls and others who are feminized. Once we have recognized the structural problems, we can then begin to evaluate and carefully develop the steps that are to be taken in helping abused individuals.

Thompson (1994) and Haney (2010) encourage us to reread our perceptions of how we see persons’ behavior. An “eating problem” or other body control behaviors may not necessarily be vain approaches or some kind of disorder making it pathological; rather they may be ways of responding to uncontrollable experiences and events that, to the individual using them, they are survival strategies. Warner encourages us to use caution in the therapeutic process to ensure that there is no further victimization of individuals seeking assistance. Additionally, she encourages that the individuals remain in control in articulating their experiences using their own voices. Therapists and other service professionals are then encouraged to provide support to assist the individual towards empowerment and healing.

“It takes a village to raise a child,” is an old African proverb that has become somewhat of a cliché. There was a time when this proverb had significant meaning to persons raising children and members of their communities, particularly in communities of people of African descent. This simple but profound proverb reminded individuals that

child rearing was not just a responsibility of the parents but also the responsibility of the entire community; therefore, everyone was responsible for providing guidance and ensuring that the children were safe and supported in their living environments. I was a member of such a community in an inner city neighborhood in Kingston, Jamaica. However, over time the community changed and some children lost the loving and supportive environment they once knew. Children are enduring various kinds of hardship, including that of sexual abuse.

Appendix

Turtle Gal

Beth Brant (1990)

SueLinn's mama was an Indian. She never knew from where, only that Dolores wore a beaded bracelet, yellow, blue and green beads woven into signs. Burnt out from alcohol and welfare, Dolores gave up one late afternoon, spoke to her daughter in a strange language, put the bracelet around her skinny girl's wrist where it flopped over her hand. She turned her face to the wall and died. November 4, 1968.

SueLinn watched her mother die. Knowing by an instinct that it was better this way. Better for Dolores; but her child mind, her nine-year-old mind, had not yet thought of the possibilities and penalties that lay in wait for little girls with no mama. She thought of her friend, James William Newton, who lived across the hall. She went and got him. He walked SueLinn back to the room where her mother lay dead.

'Lord, lord, lord, lord,' the old man chanted, as he paid his respects, covering the still, warm woman with the faded red spread. His tired eyes, weeping with moisture, looked down at the child standing close to him.

'Go get your things now, little gal. Bring everything you got. Your clothes, everything.'

With his help, she removed all the traces of herself from the darkening apartment. James William made a last, quick search, then told the child to say goodbye to her mama. He waited in the hall, his face wrinkled and yellow. His hand trembled as he reached into his pants pocket for the handkerchief, neatly folded. He shook the thin, white cloth and brought it to his eyes where he wiped the cry, then blew his nose.

SueLinn stood beside the bed she and her mother had shared for as long as the girl could remember. She pulled the spread from her mother's face. She looked intensely at Dolores. Dolores' face was quieter, younger looking. Her broad nose looked somehow more delicate. Her eyes were still closed, the dark lashes like ink marks against her reddish, smooth cheek. SueLinn felt a choking move from her stomach up through her heart, her lungs, her throat and mouth. With an intake of harsh breath, she took a lock of Dolores' black hair in her small fist. She held on, squeezing hard, as if to pull some last piece of life from her mama. She let go, turned away, and closed the door behind her. James William was waiting, his arms ready to hold the girl, ready to protect.

Together they opened his door, walked into the room that was welcoming and waiting. African violets sat in a row along the windowsill, their purple, white, and blue flowers shaking from the force of the door being closed. SueLinn went to touch the fuzzy heart

leaves, wondering once again what magic the old man carried in him to grow these queer, exotic plants in the middle of a tired, dirty street.

James William put aside the sack filled with SueLinn's few belongings and told the child to sit in his chair while he went to call the ambulance.

'Don't answer the door. Don't make no sounds. Sit quiet, little gal, and I be back in a wink.'

SueLinn sat on James William's favorite chair, a gold brocade throne, with arms that curved into wide, high wings. She stared at the window. She looked past the violets, past the ivy hanging from a pot attached to threads dangling fresh and alive in front of the glass. She looked onto the street, the avenue that held similar apartment buildings, large and grey. Some had windows knocked out; some had windows made bright by plastic flowers. Some had windows decorated with crosses and 'Jesus is my Rock' painted on from the inside. The Harbor Lights complex of the Salvation Army stood low and squat, the lights beginning to be turned on, bringing a softening sheen to the beige cement. The air was cold, the people on the street pulling their coats and jackets closer to their bodies as they walked hunched over in the struggle past the Chinese restaurants, the grocery, the bars, the apartments. Cars made noises; the noises of rust, of exhaust pipes ready to fall off, the noises of horns applied with angry hands. Buses were unloading people, doors opening to expel faces and bodies of many shapes and colors. The avenue seemed to wander forever in a road of cement, tall buildings, people, machines, eventually stopping downtown, caught up in a tangle of other avenues, streets, and boulevards.

James William walked down the three flights of stairs to the pay phone in the lobby. He called the operator to report the dead woman, walked back up the three flights of stairs, his thoughts jumping and beating against his brain as his heart lurched and skipped from the climb. When he entered his room, the child turned to look at the man.

'They be here soon child. Now we not lettin' on you here with me. We be very quiet. We let them medical peoples take care of things. We don't say one word. Ummhmmmm, we don't say a word.'

He came to the window and watched for the ambulance that eventually came screaming to the curb. Two white men, their faces harried and nervous, got out of the ambulance and entered the building. A police car followed. The cops went inside the building, where the manager was arguing with the medics.

'I don't know nothing about a dead woman! Who called you? Who did you say she was?'

The officers hurried things along, the manager angrily getting out his keys.

‘It’s probably that Indian. She’s all the time drinking and carrying on. Her and that sneaky, slant-eyed kid. Who did you say called in? Nobody let on to me.’

On the third floor, cops, medics and manager formed a phalanx around the door to 3D. Knocking and getting no answer, they unlocked the door and entered the room. Up and down the hall, doors were opened in cracks. Eyes looked out, gathering information that would be hoarded and thought about, then forgotten.

‘Anybody know this woman?’ the cops shouted in the hall.

Doors closed. Silence answered. One of the officers pounded on a door. A very old woman opened it, a sliver of light behind her.

‘Do you know this woman in 3D? When was the last time you saw her?’

Her dark brown face resettled its lines as she spoke.

I’ don’t know her. I hear she was a Injun lady. One a them Injuns from out west. I don’t know nothin’.’

The cop waved his hand in disgust. He and his partner started down the stairs, their heavy black shoes scratching the steps, the leather of their holsters squeaking as it rubbed against their guns.

James William stood, his ear pressed to the door panel. SueLinn continued to look past the glass. There were sounds of feet moving away, sound of hard breathing as the body of Dolores was carried down the three flights of stairs and out into the cold November twilight.

Children were massed on the sidewalks, faces sharp and excited. Mothers called to them, the air moving with words of Chinese, English, other languages tumbling together to make one sound. Together, SueLinn and James William watched the white truck back up, turn around, and head for uptown and the morgue. The cops followed.

James William Newton was 70 years old. Singer of the blues, Prince of Georgia Blues, Sweet William, he moved from the window, went to the kitchenette, and put the kettle on to boil. He moved slowly to the icebox, then to the cupboard, taking out a pot and settling it on the hotplate. Everything surrounding James William was small and tiny like him. The table, covered in blue oilcloth, was just big enough for two. Little wood chairs were drawn tight up to the edge of the table, waiting for Sweet William’s hands to arrange the seating. The one window in the kitchenette was hung with starched white curtains trimmed in royal-blue rick-rack. A single wall was papered in teapots and kettles, red and blue splashed on a yellow background. The wall was faded from age but still looked cheerful and surprising. A cupboard painted white held the thick dishes and the food.

Rice, red beans, spices, cornmeal, salt, honey, and sugar. A cardboard box placed on the cracked yellow linoleum held potatoes and onions, the papery skins sometimes falling to the floor, coming to rest by the broom and dustpan leaning against the teapot wall.

On the first night of SueLinn's new life, she watched James William work in the kitchen, her eyes not moving from his round body as he walked the few steps across the linoleum, taking leaves out of the tin box, placing them in a brown pot, pouring the whistling water over the tea. He replaced the lid on the pot, removed a tea cozy from a hook, and placed this over the teapot. The child, ever fascinated by Sweet William's routine, his fussy kitchen work, his hands dusting and straightening, felt comforted by the familiar activity. Often Sweet William had made supper for the girl. Cooking up the rice, a towel wrapped around his fat waist, mashing the potatoes, adding canned milk and butter. Sometimes, there were pork hocks or chitlins. The hot, pungent dishes were magic, made from the air and a little salt.

James William sang quietly as he busied himself with the pot of soup. His eyes grabbed quick looks toward the chair and the thin, gold child who watched him with blank eyes. Little folds of flesh covered her eyelids, which she rapidly opened and closed. Sitting like that, so still, her eyes blinking, blinking, she reminded the old man of a turtle he'd seen a long time ago, home in Georgia.

Poking around in the marsh, he and his friends had found a spotted turtle, upside down, struggling to put itself right. He had picked up the turtle and looked at its head, pulling in, eyefolds closing over the eyes in panic, then opening, staring at him. He had set the turtle on its legs where it continued on. They boys had watched and laughed at the creature's slow journey. James remembered the turtle, remembered his friends; the sweetness of them. Memories like this came often in a haze. When they came to his mind, he clutched them, holding on to each minute of them, afraid never to see them again. He recalled the day. So hot and lush, you could hold the air in your hand and feel it wet on your skin. He recalled the smell of the swamp, a green smell, a salty smell. He recalled the reeds pulled from the mud, stuck between their lips. The taste of bitter grass mingling with another taste of sweet, almost like the stick of licorice his daddy had brought him from town. He tried to recall his friends, their names, the colors of brown and tan, but the memory was going. Yet, he remembered the black skin of Isaac, his best friend of all. Remembered, when Isaac held his arm, the thin fingers spread out looked like molasses spilled against his own yellowish, almost white-looking arm. Isaac?

Stirring the soup, he sang bits of song culled from memories of his mama, church, and memories of the band, Big Bill and the Brown Boys. Tunes spun from his lips. Notes and chords played in his throat, starting somewhere in his mind, trickling down through his scratchy voice box, coming out, round, weeping and full. Sweet William sang, his face shifting as he wove the music in and out, in and out of his body. His head moved and

dipped, his shoulders shrugged and jerked to emphasize a word, a phrase. To SueLinn, it was as pleasurable to watch Sweet William sing, as it was to listen. His words and music were almost the same. Sad and lonely words, words that came from headache, a home with no furniture.

‘Lord, what I gonna do with this here child. Now listen up girl. You gonna be my little gal. We be mama and little gal. We be a family. Mmmhmmm, anybody ask you, you be mine. It ain’t gonna be easy. Old James William here, he gots to think of some heavy talkin’ to fool them peoples be snoopin’ round here. Them government types. Yes mam, James William got to think of some serious talkin’. Lord! Old man like myself with a child. A baby! I tells you, you know I never bes married. Least-wise, not no marriage like the government peoples thinks is right. Just me and Big Bill, moving’ with that band. Me bein’ a fool many a time over some sweet boy what talks with lots of sugar and no sense. But that Big Bill, he were some man. Always take me back, like I never did no wrong. Yes mam, I be a fool many a time. But I always got a little work. Workin’ on them cars sometime. Child, I swear the metal in my blood! I can still hear that noise. Whoo, it like to kill me! That noise, them cars hurryin’ along the line, waitin’ for a screw here, a jab there. But I worked it! I worked it! Yes I did, and me and Big Bill, we make a home. Yes we did. We did. And before the sugar and the high bloods get him, we was a family, that fine man and me. Mmmhmmm. Now look at her sit there with them turtle eyes. She can’t talk! Now listen here baby, you mama at rest now, bless her sorry little life. You gort you another kind a mama now. I take care of my baby. You mama so peaceful now. With the angels and the Indians. She make that transition over, mmhmm. She be happy. Now I gots to make this here turtle gal happy. You gots to cry sometime child. Honey lamb, you gots to cry. If you don’t grieve and wail, it get all caught up in you, start to twistin’ your inside so bad. Girl! It hurt not to cry. You listen to this old man. Sweet William, he know what he talkin’ bout.’

*Precious lord, take my hand
Lead me to that promise land
In that Kingdom grace is nigh
In that Kingdom way on high.*

The old man began his song in a whisper. As he ladled out the soup into bowls, he switched from hymn to blues, the two fitting together like verse and chorus. He nodded his head toward the child, inviting her to sing with him. SueLinn’s thin voice joined James William’s fat one.

*Heaven’s cryin’, seem like the rain keep comin’ down
Heaven’s cryin’, seem like the rain keep comin’ down
That heaven don’t let up
Since my baby left this mean ole town.*

They sang together. They sang for Dolores. They sang for Bib Bill. They sang for each other. Blues about being poor, being colored, being out of pocket. Blues about home. And home was a hot, sweet, green and brown place. Home was a place where your mama was, waiting on a porch, or cooking up the greens. Home was where you were somebody. Your name was real, and the people knew your name and called you by that name. It was when you got to the city that your name became an invisible thing, next to the other names you were called, familiar names all the same. *Nigger, bitch, whore, shine, boy*. It was when you got to the city that you started to choke on your name and your breath, and a new kind of blues was sung. SueLinn often asked about home. And Sweet William sang and sang.

*Precious lord take my hand
Lead me to that promise land
In that Kingdom grace is nigh
In that Kingdom way on high.*

The man came from the Kitchen and picked the child up in his arms, set her on his lap in the brocade chair, covered them with his special afghan, and the two rocked and swayed.

‘She like a bird, no weight on her at all. I *do* likes a rock in this old chair. It help a person to think and study on things what ails us. Yes mam, just a rickin’ and a studyin’ on those things.’

SueLinn’s tears began. She sobbed, the wails moving across the room, coming back as an echo. James William sang, crooned, wiped her eyes and his own with the dry palms of his hands.

‘My baby. My turtle gal. Lord, I remember my own mama’s passin’. It hurt so bad! She were a good woman, raisin’ us ten kids. My daddy workin’ his body to a early grave. It hurt when a mama die! Seem like they should always just go on bein’ our mama. Yellin’ to be good, bein’ proud when we deserves it. You mama, she try her best. She were a sad woman. She love you, little gal. And I loves you. We be a family now. Big Bill! You hear that? A family! SueLinn Longhorse and James William Newton. Now ain’t they gonna look twice at this here family? I tell you. I tell *you*! It be all right, my baby girl. It be all right.’

SueLinn stopped crying as suddenly as she had started. Her thin face with its slanted eyes, small nose, and full lips subdued itself.

‘But James William! I hear people talk about heaven. My mom didn’t believe in it, but where will she go now? I don’t know where she is! And sometimes... Sometimes, she said she wished I was never born.’

The girl stared into the old man's face, trusting him to give her the answers. Trusting him to let her know why she ached so much, why she always felt alone and like a being who didn't belong on this earth. His skin was smooth, except for the cracks around his eyes and down his cheeks, ending at the corners of his mouth. His eyes were brown and yellow, matching the color of his skin, like mottled corn, covered with hundreds of freckles. He had few teeth except for a startling white stump here and there. When he opened his mouth to sing, it looked like stars on a black map. His lips were wide and dark brown. His nose was flat, the nostrils deep.

'Baby, I don't know bout no heaven. My mama truly believed it. But I thinks this here story bout pearly gates asnd all is just a trick. Seem like there ain't nothin' wrong with this here earth. The dirt gonna cover her and that be right with her. She miss the sky and the wind and the land. Told me plenty a time. Seem like, compared to that heavn where the peoples hang playing harps and talkin' sweet, this here earth ain't so bad. You mama, she be mighty unhappy in a place where they ain't no party or good lovin' goin' on! Seem like that heaven talk is just a way to get the peoples satisfied with the misery they has to bear in this here world. Once you gets to thinkin' that a reward waitin' on you for bein' poor and colored, why it just beat you down more. You don't gets to think about doin' sometin' about it right here, right now. Mmmmmhmmm, them white peoples, they thinks of everything. But there be a lot they don't know. Everything don't always mean *every thing!* I do believe Dolores be more at rest in the brown dirt. And lord, child, from jump every mama wish her children never be born sometime! That's a fact. Mmmmmhmmm. Honey, she love you. She just too full a pain to remember to *tell* you. It just like me and Big Bill. Why, they be days go by we forgets to say, Big Bill you my onliest one. James William, you sure one fine man. Then you gets to thinkin', hey, this man don't love me no more! And you gets afraid to ask, because you thinkin' that's *his* duty to remember. Then you gets mad and sad all together, and then you speakin' in shortness and evil kinda ways. You forgets that everybody be carryin' his own pain and bad things. The disrememberin' be a thing that happen though. We be foolish, us peoples. Ain't no way getting' round that! Seem like, if we be perfect, we be white peoples up there in that heaven they thinks so special! Yes, yes, we be in that white heaven, with the white pearly gates and the white robes and the white slippers. Child! Lord child! Whooo!'

And he laughed and laughed, hugging SueLinn tight, his chest rumbling in her ear. She laughed too, even though she wasn't sure she knew the joke. But it made her feel better, to be sitting in Sweet William's lap, her head pressed to his heart, the afghan of bright colors covering her coldness and fright. She had laughed with Dolores. Mostly over Dolores' mimicry of the people in the street or in the bars. She almost became those people, so good was she at capturing a gesture, a voice, a way of holding her body. There was no meanness in the foolery; just fun, just a laugh, a present for SueLinn.

They unfolded from the brocade chair and went to the table. The tiny Black man with light skin. The tiny girl of gold skin and Indian hair, her body wrapped in the afghan crocheted by Sweet William's hands. The colors moved across her back, the ends trailing on the floor. As Sweet William poured the tea, his white shirt dazzled the girl's eyes. She watched his short legs walk slowly to the stove, his small feet wearing the felt slippers he never seemed to take off. He was wearing his favorite pants, grey flannel with handsome pleats in the front and small cuffs at the bottom. And his favorite belt, a wide alligator strip weaving in and out of the grey wool belt loops. The buckle was of solid silver, round and etched with the words *Florida Everglades*. It had been a gift from Big Bill, so many years ago the date and reason for the gift were lost in James William's memory. He only remembered Big Bill's face as he handed the belt to Sweet William. The dark beige of his skin flushing and reddening as he pushed the tissue-wrapped gift toward James William, Saying, 'Here honey. For you. A gift.'

James William's starched, white shirt had cuffs turned back, fastened with silver-colored links, a red stone gleaming in the center of each piece of metal. She looked at the stones that seemed to signal on—off—stop—red means stop.

She had learned that in school when she had started kindergarten. That was four years ago. She was in third grade now, a big girl. She liked school. At least, she liked it when she went. When her mom remembered to send her. When SueLinn remembered to wash out her T-shirt so she could be clean. When she felt safe to ask Dolores to braid her long hair without making the woman cry. When Dolores was in a good mood from having extra money and bought SueLinn plaid dresses and white socks and shoes that were shiny and had buckles instead of laces. Dolores talked loud these times, stalked about how her baby was just as good as anybody, and, anyway, she was the prettiest kid in school by far. SueLinn had a hard time understanding this talk. Everybody in school wore old clothes and shoes with laces. It didn't make sense. Maybe it had to do with the picture magazines that showed up around the apartment. The people on the shiny pages were always white and stood in funny poses. They wore fancy clothes and coats made from animals. They looked as if they were replaying statues, which SueLinn had played once with the kids at school. It was a scary feeling to stop and stand so still until the boss kid said you could move. She liked it though. It made her feel invisible. If she were really a statue, she'd be made out of stone or wood, something hard. Sort of like the statues at the place her teacher, Miss Terrell, had taken them. Miss Terrell had called the giant building a museum and called the statues sculptures. She had pointed out the one made by a colored man. She took them to the Chinese room. The Chinese kids had stood around self-consciously, denying any link to a people who wrote on silk and made bowls of green, so thick and fine one could see through to the other side. She took them to see a display case that had Indian jewelry resting on pieces of wood, only Miss Terrell had called it Native American art. The Indian kids had smirked and poked each other and hung back shyly as

they all looked at the bead work and silver work so fantastic no human could have been remotely connected to the wearing of it. SueLinn had remembered her mother's beaded bracelet and stared at the glass case. It made her want to cry for a reason she couldn't begin to think about. She remembered the Chinese room and the Indian case for a long time after that. She told her mom about them. Dolores said it would be nice to go there, she had gone there once, she thought. But they never talked about it again. SueLinn was not a statue, but bony and covered with soft gold skin and coarse black hair that reached beyond her shoulder blades. She practiced statues at home, standing on the worn, green couch, trying to see herself in the wavy mirror on the opposite wall.

'Getting stuck on yourself, honey? That's how I started. A grain of salt. That's what we should take ourselves with. We're just bones and skin, honey. Bones and skin.'

The child thought her mother much more than bones and skin and salt. She thought Dolores was beautiful and was proud to walk with her on the avenue. The day they got the food stamps was one of the best days. Dolores was sober on those days. She sat at the card table, making lists and menus. Dolores labored hard on those days. Looking through her magazines, cutting out recipes for 'tasty, nutritional meals within your budget.' SueLinn stayed close to her mother on those days, fascinated by Dolores' activity.

'How would you like chicken vegetable casserole on Monday? Then on Tuesday we could have Hawaiian chicken. I found a recipe for peanut butter cookies. It says that peanut butter is a good source of protein. Would you like Dolores to make you cookies, baby? Maybe we could make them together.' SueLinn shook her head yes and stood even closer to her mother. Shiny paper with bright colors of food lay emblazoned on the table. SueLinn was caught by Dolores' words. Her magic talk of casseroles and cookies. Writing down words that came back as food. Food was something real, yet mysterious. Food was something there never was enough of. And she knew there were people in the world who always had enough to eat, who could even choose the food they ate. People who went into stores and restaurants and read the labels and the columns and maybe glanced at prices, but often paid no attention to such details. SueLinn didn't know how she knew this was so, but she knew all the same. She ate a free lunch at school. Always hungry, eating too fast, not remembering what she ate, just eating, then being hungry again. Miss Terrell asked each morning if anyone had forgotten to eat breakfast, because she just happened to bring orange juice and graham crackers from home. There was always enough for everyone. Miss Terrell was a magic teacher. Her whole being was magic. Her skin was darker than any colored person SueLinn had ever known. Almost a pure black, like the stone set in the school door, proclaiming when it was built (1910) and whose name it was built to honor (Jeremy Comstock). Marble, yes that's what Miss Terrell called it. Black marble, that was Miss Terrell's skin. Her hair was cut close to her head. It curled tight against her scalp. James William's hair was like this, but somehow

not so tightly curled and his hair was white, while Miss Terrell's was as black as her skin. She wore red lipstick, sometimes a purple color to match her dress with the white and pink dots on the sash. Her clothes were a marvel to see. Blue skirt and red jackets. Green dresses with gold buttons. Her shoes, a red or black shining material with pointy, pointy toes and little wood heels. Miss Terrell was tall and big. Some of the boys whispered and laughed about Miss Terrell's 'boobs.' SueLinn saw nothing to laugh at, only knowing that boys giggled about sex things. She thought Miss Terrell's chest was very beautiful. It stuck out far and looked proud in a way. When she had mentioned this to James William, he had said, 'Child, that Alveeta Terrell be a regular proud woman. Why wouldn't her chest be as proud as the rest of her? She mighty good-lookin' and one smart lady. You know you just as lucky as can be to have proud Alveeta Terrell be your teacher!'

One time, and it was the best time, Miss Terrell had come to school in a yellow dress over which she wore a length of material made from multi-colored threads of green, red, purple, yellow and black. She had called it Kente cloth and told the class it had been woven in Africa and the people, even the men, wore it every day. It was a day the Black people celebrated being African, and, even though they might live in all kinds of places, they had still come from Africa at one time. Then she had shown them a map of Africa, then traced lines running from that continent to America, to the West Indies, to South America, to just about everywhere. Amos asked if Africa was so good, why did the people leave? Miss Terrell said the people didn't leave because they wanted to, but because these other people, Spanish, British, American, French had wanted slaves to work on their land and make things grow for them so they could get rich. And these same people had killed Indians and stolen land, had lied and cheated to get more land from the people who were the original owners. And these same people, these white people, needed labor that didn't cost anything so they could get richer and richer. They had captured Black people as if they were herds of animals and put them in chains and imported them to countries where their labor was needed. The children pondered on this for minutes, before raising their hands and asking questions. The whole school day was like that, the kids questioning and pondering, Miss Terrell answering in her clear, sure voice. It seemed as though she knew everything. She told them about Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Chrispus Attucks whose last name meant deer, because his mama was a Choctaw Indian. She told them about Touissant L'Overture, about the Maroons in Jamaica, she told them about the Seminoles and Africans in Florida creating an army to fight the U.S. soldiers and how they won the fight. SueLinn's mind was so filled with these wondrous facts, she even dreamed about them that night. And it came to her that Miss Terrell was a food-giver. Her thoughts and facts were like the graham crackers she laid out on her desk each morning. They were free to take; to eat right at that moment, or to save up for when one got real hungry. SueLinn copied down her realization in the little notebook she

carried with her everywhere. 'Miss Terrell is a food-giver.' She told James William, who agreed.

Food-stamp day. Dolores making something out of nothing. What did it mean? Everything meant something. This she had learned on her own; from the streets, from the people who surrounded her, from being a kid. SueLinn wanted to ask Dolores about it, but was too shy.

Dolores was ready. SueLinn pattered at the card table, stalling for time, prolonging the intimacy with her mother. SueLinn was not ready for the store. It happened every time. Dolores got sad. The store defeated her. It was a battle to see how far down the aisles she could get before giving up. The limp vegetables, the greenish-brown meat, the lack of anything resembling the good food in the magazines. SueLinn sensed it before it came. The faint shug of Dolores' shoulders, the shake of her head as if clearing it from a fog or a dream. Then they proceeded fast, Dolores grabbing at things that were cheap and filling, if only for a few hours. The little girl tried calling her mama's attention to funny people in the store or some fancy-packaged box of air and starch. Anything, please, please, that would take that look off Dolores' face. That look of fury and contempt. That look of losing. They would end up coming home with a few things like bread and canned corn and maybe hamburger sometimes, cereal in a box and a bottle of milk. Dolores would put the pitiful groceries away, go out and not return until the next day.

Dolores picked up her lists and stamps, placed them in her purse, a beige plastic bag with her initials stamped in gold letting. D.L. Dolores Longhorse. She went to the wavy mirror and with her little finger applied blue eye shadow because, 'You never know who we'll meet.' She brushed her black hair until it cracked with sparks and life across her wide back. Dressed in blue jeans too tight, a pink sweater frayed and unraveling at the bottom, her gold-tone earrings swinging and dancing, she defied anyone or anything to say she didn't exist. 'Let's go.'

Her daughter took hold of her mother's hand and stared up at Dolores, as if to burn the image of her mama into her brain, to keep the smell of lily-of-the-valley cologne in her nose. The brown eyes ringed in blue looked down at her child. Dark eye watched dark eye. Two females locked in an embrace of color, blood and bewildering love. Dolores broke the intensity of the moment, cast her eyes around the apartment, committing to memory what she had come home to, tightening her hold on SueLinn's hand, and said, once again, 'Let's go.' She set the lock, and the two went out onto the street.

SueLinn's eyes closed with this last memory. Her head nodded above the soup. James William rose from the table and pulled the bed down from the wall. Straightening the covers and fluffing the pillows, he made it ready for the child's tired body. He picked her up and carried her the few feet to the bed. Taking off her shoes, he gently placed the girl

under the blankets and tucked the pillow under her head. He placed the afghan at the foot of the bed, folded and neat.

James William Newton went to his chair and sat in the night-time light. He could see a piece of the moon through a crack between the two buildings across the street.

‘Ole moon, what you think? I got this here child now. Them government peoples be wantin’ to know where this child be. Or is they? Seem like the whereabouts of a little gal ain’t gonna concern too many of them. Now I ain’t worryin’ bout raisin’ this here turtle gal. It one of them things I be prepared to do. Moon, we gots to have a plan. I an old man. This here baby needs me, yes she does. There gots to be some providin’ to do. Big Bill? Is you laughin’ at me? It be a fix we in. Mmmhmmm, a regular fix. Big Bill? I needs a little a them words you always so ready with. Honey, it ever be a wonder how a man could talk so much and *still* make sense like you done! I sittin’ here waitin’ on you. Yes sir, I sittin’ and waitin’ on you.

He sat through the night, refilling his cup many times. His memories came and went like the peppermint tea he drank. Sometime before dawn, he drank his last cup, rinsed it and set it upside down in the sink. He settled his body on the blue davenport, the afghan pulled up to his shoulders. He looked one more time at the child, her dark hair half-hiding her face in sleep.

‘Child, sleep on and dream. Sweet William, he here. You be all right. Yes mam, you be all right.’

He closed his eyes and slept.

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